

LINCOLN'S THIRD PARTY

by Elizabeth Lawson



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C O N T E N T S

INTRODUCTION	5
LINCOLN'S THIRD PARTY	8
THE AGGRESSIONS OF THE SLAVE POWER	8
RISE OF THE FREE-LABOR SYSTEM	11
SLAVERY'S EFFECT ON LABOR	13
ROLE OF THE ABOLITIONISTS	16
THE LIBERTY PARTY	17
INTERNAL DISSENSION IN THE OLD PARTIES	20
DEATH OF THE WHIG PARTY	22
BIRTH OF THE REPUBLICAN PARTY	25
THE 1860 REPUBLICAN CONVENTION	30
ABRAHAM LINCOLN	32
THE ANTI-LINCOLN CAMPAIGN OF 1860	39
THE REPUBLICAN CAMPAIGN OF 1860	40
LINCOLN'S THIRD PARTY VICTORIOUS	44
REFERENCE NOTES	47

by the same author

SAMUEL ADAMS: SELECTIONS FROM HIS WRITINGS
THADDEUS STEVENS

Introduction

Rooted deeply in America's past is the tradition of opposition political parties which have arisen from among the people, at critical periods, to challenge the domination of reactionary classes. Two of these opposition parties, the Democratic-Republican organized by Thomas Jefferson and the early Republican Party of the pre-Civil War period, grew powerful enough to wrest from the reactionaries the political control of the government.

Other opposition parties have exercised immense influence on the course of our history. Many labor parties were organized on a local and state scale in the 1820's and 1830's, and elected a number of candidates to municipal and state offices.¹ The Populist revolt of the last decades of the nineteenth century, a revolt against monopoly, organized into the People's Party and based chiefly on the farmers and workers of the Middle West and South, received over one million votes for its Presidential candidate, James B. Weaver, in 1892, and this at a time when the suffrage was far narrower than today, only ten-and-a-half million votes being cast. In the same year, the People's Party elected governors in four western states; it had three United States Senators and ten Congressmen. By 1893, there were 345 People's Party representatives in nineteen state legislatures.²

Theodore Roosevelt, on the ticket of the Progressive Party (the "Bull Moose") in 1912, received four million out of fourteen million votes. The Socialist Eugene Debs, imprisoned for his opposition to World War I, got one million votes in 1920. Four million, eight hundred thousand voters cast their ballots in 1924 for Robert LaFollette in a campaign organized by labor and

progressives. Innumerable parties have sprung up in the last half-century on a state and municipal scale to challenge the corruption and misrule of the old-party machines, and many have had outstanding electoral successes.

Latest of the "third-party" movements is the anti-fascist, anti-imperialist, peace party, born in 1948 with Henry Wallace as its central figure.

Reactionary historians and reactionary politicians of today notwithstanding, the opposition parties—sometimes loosely grouped as "third parties"—are an integral part of America's past and present, and most certainly of her future. The two-party system in the United States is not only not sacrosanct; it is not even traditional. If any one thing is characteristic of America's political history, it is the kaleidoscopic shift and change of parties. Since parties are the organized political expression of classes in conflict, each important mutation in class alignments has occasioned a mutation of political parties.

This pamphlet tells the story of the birth, rise, and swift triumph of one of the early opposition parties, the Republican. This party, in its youth, represented a coalition of revolutionary forces embattled against one of the most powerful and ruthless of all ruling classes, the American slavocracy.

For a brief period in America's past, the interests of workers and farmers, on the question of slavery, coincided with the interests of manufacturing capitalists. The slaveholders were enemies to all these classes, a stumbling block to their development and to the development of the American nation.

The coalition that formed the early Republican Party was, of necessity, temporary. Once the incubus of slavery was thrown off, the manufacturers were free—free not only to develop industry, but to oppress to the full the masses of the people.

Within less than two decades after its revolutionary seizure of state power, the Republican Party had already become the instrument of reaction, equally with the Democratic Party which it had once so valiantly fought when the Democratic Party was the

bulwark of chattel slavery. The Republican Party now became one of the two major parties of reaction in the United States; never again was it to resume its early progressive role. The heritage of which this pamphlet tells is no longer the possession of the Republican Party; that party has, by its actions, repudiated its great past.

Today a working class, no longer in swaddling clothes, but greatly matured, and its allies, the masses of farmers, sections of the urban middle groups, and the Negro people, are challenging the domination of the monopoly capitalists, the American imperialists.

This new, progressive coalition not only rejects the charge of "un-Americanism" on the score of organizing a third party. It is, on the contrary, continuing in the best tradition of political parties in the United States.

To prove this, is one of the aims of the present pamphlet.

E. L.

Lincoln's Third Party

In a small Wisconsin village, almost a century ago, a new political party was born—a party that grew in six years from a handful of men in Ripon's Congregational Church to the power that elected the chief executive of the nation.

In the decade before the Civil War, the old political parties—how indestructible they had seemed!—were convulsed and split asunder. One party of long standing vanished from the scene. Another was splintered into two warring camps. And as the contest rose to a climax, a new political party came into being. It was dedicated to ending slavery's expansion in America. It was to this purpose that the assembled citizens of Ripon resolved "to throw the old party organizations to the winds and organize a new party on the sole basis of the non-extension of slavery."

The Aggressions of the Slave Power

The cannon-shot that blazed a red trail across the sky of Charleston Harbor at half-past four on the morning of April 12, 1861, marked the culmination of forty years of aggression by the slaveholding class. In those years, each act of aggression had been met with concessions; each concession had been followed by a new aggression, until in 1860, the success of the Republican Party at the polls heralded an end to acquiescence. To the slaveholders the party declared: You have marched the breadth of the continent; you have gained your aims by legislation, bribery, war, and terror. This year marks the end of your triumph. From this day on, the unsettled lands of the nation belong to free men.

The theme of America's history from 1820 to 1860 was the onward rush of slavery. The mainspring of the era's development

was the struggle to overthrow the slavocracy. For four decades, the slave power, aided by the merchants and bankers who shaped northern politics, gained vast new lands, expanding the six states of its original domain until it reached the western boundary of Texas. It was ambitious for infinitely more—for all the West, for Mexico, Central America, South America, and Cuba.

Swift exhaustion of the soil was characteristic of slave cultivation. Slave labor was, for the most part, of necessity unskilled labor, ruinous to the land. The masters dared permit none but a few carefully chosen slaves to learn skills. Rotation of crops was impossible, for that required a more versatile labor force than the slaves provided; further, the demand for cotton was rising, and the sale of the crop was assured.

The South could do no more than scratch the surface of the soil, and move on. Slavery must expand or die. Not only for cultivation did the South need new land. It required also new states carved out of slave territory, so that a pro-slavery Senate might counterbalance the growing anti-slavery forces in the House of Representatives. It needed, too, the prospect of new lands to bribe the non-slaveholding whites of the South, seducing them with the promise of themselves becoming slaveholders.

Hence the South's aggressive role in national politics, its constant demand for more and more territory. Hence the struggle for the West. Hence the annexation of Texas, the war with Mexico, the armed battles in Kansas, the filibustering* expeditions into Latin America. Hence, finally, the Civil War, set off by the victory of a party pledged against the further extension of the slave system.

Behind the formation of this party—the Republican—and its rapid ascent to power, lay decades of shifting political alignments.

* "Filibustering" is here used as it was at that period: the organizing of private expeditions into a foreign country in order to overthrow its government and either place in office a native government friendly to slave settlement by Americans, or, through American arms, to seize the country and turn it into a slave state.

Slavery's earliest territorial aggression occurred in an era of one-party rule. Already eager, in 1818, to expand, the slaveholders demanded the admission, with slavery, of Missouri. The Missouri Compromise, reached in 1820, provided for the admission of Missouri as a slave state, but prohibited the institution in any future state north of the line of 36°30' North latitude, which might be carved out of the Louisiana purchase territory. By this "compromise," the slave power gained two additional states.

The Compromise of 1820 led to no changes in the existing party situation. Although the compromise was destined to affect the American future deeply, slavery was not yet in the center of the political stage. Other issues were, for the moment, more important, and would continue so until the question of slavery pushed everything else aside.

The only party in existence at the time was the Democratic-Republican. This party had been formed under the leadership of Thomas Jefferson to fight the Federalist Party. The Federalist had been a Tory party led by Alexander Hamilton, a party representative of the merchants, bankers, and speculators. The Democratic-Republican Party, which first put forward a Presidential candidate in 1796, aligned farmers, workers, artisans, and slaveholders. The slaveholders entered into the alliance because they, like the farmers, wished to expand to the West—a major point in the party program.

The Federalist Party, however, had exposed itself in the War of 1812 as not only reactionary but treasonable. After 1816, it had presented no Presidential candidate, and so only the Democratic-Republican Party remained. For some years a period of one-party rule was possible, even though there were sharp class differences and antagonisms. The first major problem of our history, the establishment of an independent nation, had been solved by two wars of national liberation. The second major problem, slavery, was not yet ready for solution. Not yet were the lines drawn for the coming struggle, and for a time no new political parties appeared.

Within the one party, nevertheless, factions began to form, which later became separate political parties. A grouping calling itself the National Republicans crystallized in 1832 as the Whig Party. This was the political representative of the wealthier classes in every section of the country—the party of big slaveholders, big merchants, big manufacturers, big northern landholders. These classes were united in their hatred of Andrew Jackson; the manufacturers and merchants hated him for his fight against the Bank of the United States, and the big slaveholders for his rebuke to the planting interests when South Carolina in 1832 attempted to nullify the tariff. Both groups hated him for the democratic tenor of his administrations.

The Democratic coalition in the single existing party, on the other hand, crystallized as the Democratic Party, the coalition of smaller merchants, smaller manufacturers, smaller slaveholders, and of workers and farmers. Its leader was Andrew Jackson.

As the slavery issue came to the fore, however, these coalitions became ever more unstable, and, eventually, untenable.

So began that redrawing of political lines that was to culminate in the formation of the Republican Party. Behind these events lay the rise of new classes—classes that had not seriously disputed the Missouri Compromise, but that, two decades later, would allow no slavery aggression to pass unchallenged.

What were these new classes? Whence their hatred of the slave power?

Rise of the Free-Labor System

By the 1840's, American industry had broken through the barriers erected during our years of colonial subjection to Britain and by the restrictions which Britain continued to impose until our second war for independence in 1812. Not yet, however, was industry a dominant power in the United States. Its ability to produce was straitjacketed by the slaveholders who ruled the nation.

The entire slave territory was barred as a field for capital investment. Below the Mason-Dixon line, industry was almost negligible. Planters' profits were at once reinvested in more slaves and more land, each plantation competing for an ever larger share in the constantly expanding and always profitable cotton market. The slaveholders had no money for factories, mills, mines. Neither did they welcome the growth in their midst, of a class of factory workers which would inevitably challenge their domination. The slave insurrections, it was understood, had failed of their immediate objectives largely because the slaves lacked sufficient white allies in the South.

To use slaves in industry was as difficult as to use them in scientific agriculture. Use of slave labor forbade the easy contraction and expansion of the labor force which capitalism needs. Further, industrial operations called for training which the masters dared not allow their slaves to acquire.

The apologists for slavery understood this situation well. Senator Hayne of South Carolina stated that "Slaves are too improvident, too incapable of that minute, constant, delicate attention, and that persevering industry which are essential to manufacturing establishments."³ "The slave should be kept as much as possible to agricultural labors," said the *South Carolina State Gazette*. "These so employed are found to be the most orderly and obedient of slaves."⁴

The South's standard of living—for Negroes, for the masses of whites—was low, furnishing a poor outlet for manufactures and food. Further, its imports came in part from England, so that American manufacturers were cut off from the full exploitation of the home market. It was the South's aim to deal directly with England and to by-pass northern manufacturers if it could. A protective tariff would have benefited American industry, but after the threat of secession by South Carolina in 1832, in protest against protection, the slave-owners' government at Washington quickly reduced the duties.

Still other barriers did the slave system place in the way of

America's industrial development. In a period of industrial expansion and labor shortage, a large potential labor force, the majority of the American Negroes, were bound for life to the plantations.

National subsidies for railroads, turnpikes, and canals, so vital to industrial life, were unobtainable, for such subsidies, paid for by all sections of the nation, would not benefit the slaveholders.

Slavery's Effect on Labor

The working class, too, had its grievances against the slave power. "In the United States of North America," Karl Marx was to write later, "every independent movement of the workers was paralyzed so long as slavery disfigured a part of the Republic."⁵

The obstacles which slavery set to industrial expansion were, necessarily, obstacles to opportunities for employment. Slave territory was almost barren of jobs for free laborers. Non-slaveholding whites were weighted with the burdens of slave competition and class taxation. Owners of slave mechanics underbid free labor. Slave-owners paid no taxes on slaves, but workers paid heavy taxes on tools.

The northern workers, when they migrated, went West, not South. Immigrants from Europe settled chiefly in the North and Northwest. Whatever non-agricultural jobs the South had were filled by slaves who were hired out by their owners, or by southern whites who were paid far less than northern workers, or by free Negroes who were paid even less than southern whites. The North-South wage differential was well established before the Civil War.

One of the demands of the American labor movement was cheap—or, better still, free—land in the West. True, that for the overwhelming majority of the workers, ownership of a farm was, even in that day, an unrealizable dream. Yet the very possibility of such ownership was important to the maintenance of

American standards. A free West would be a region of relatively good living conditions, a market for eastern manufactures.

The workers were a strong force against slavery extension. There were, nevertheless, two working-class groups that opposed the anti-slavery movement. Some workers were confused by eastern banking and merchant capital; they were told that their jobs depended upon commerce with the South. This was particularly true of the dock workers of New York.

Another group was influenced by the sectarianism of a handful of labor leaders who believed chattel slavery to be "no worse than wage slavery." The most prominent of these was George Evans, who in his paper, *Young America*, went to the length of opposing Negro emancipation. Evans declared wage slavery to be "even more destructive of life, health and happiness than chattel slavery, as it exists in our Southern states," and said that "the efforts of those who are endeavoring to substitute wages for chattel slavery are greatly misdirected." To the Abolitionist Gerrit Smith, Evans wrote: "I was formerly, like yourself, sir, a very warm advocate of the abolition of slavery. This was before I saw that there was *white* slavery. Since I saw this, I have materially changed my views as to the means of abolishing Negro slavery. I now see, clearly, I think, that to give the landless black the privilege of changing masters now possessed by the landless *white*, would hardly be a benefit to him in exchange for his surity of support in sickness and old age, although he is in a favorable climate. If the Southern form of slavery existed at the North, I should say the black would be a great loser by such a change."⁶

It was Evans' belief that distribution of free land would solve the problems of both slaves and wage laborers. What he did not see was that the slaveholders, because they wanted to expand their system westward, were the chief opponents of a Homestead Act.

Even in the ranks of German workers, who were among the first to embrace the anti-slavery movement, there were a few who failed to see that the system of slavery was a monstrous

obstacle in the path of the labor movement. Thus Hermann Kriege stated in 1846 in a New York labor paper:

"We should declare ourselves in favor of the Abolitionist movement if it were our intention to throw the Republic into a state of anarchy, to extend the competition of 'free workingmen' beyond all measure, and to depress labor itself to the last extremity. . . . We could not improve the lot of our 'black brothers' by abolition under the conditions prevailing in modern society, but make infinitely worse the lot of our 'white brothers.' . . . We feel constrained, therefore, to oppose Abolition with all our might."⁷

Most workers, however, realized that "Labor cannot emancipate itself in the white skin where in the black it is branded."⁸

The independent farmers in the North and West were almost unanimously opposed to slavery extension. They needed a free West. They did not relish the prospect of living in the shadow of large plantations and being pushed down into "poor-whiteism." They needed, further, the federal assistance that would build railroads, canals, and turnpikes, bringing them easy access to the markets of the East. As means of transport were developed, and as the issue of slavery expansion became more important, the West broke off its alliance with the South—the alliance that had helped elect Jefferson and Jackson—and allied itself with the Northeast.

Facing the coalition of progressive classes were slaveholders, merchant capitalists, bankers. As long as slavery existed, so long would southern ports and the southern carrying trade remain undeveloped, and so long would northern merchants enjoy a monopoly.

The bankers invested their money, not in industry, but in southern plantations. Not yet had there taken place in the United States the marriage of banking and industrial enterprise that is finance capital.

So were the lines drawn as the nation's attention became centered on slavery. On the one side, the forces of progress: the industrial capitalists, workers, independent farmers, and all

classes of the Negro people. On the other, the slaveholders, who were the ruling class, and their northern handmaidens, the bankers and merchants.

Role of the Abolitionists

The rising, revolutionary classes were to burst the confines of the old parties and find new political organizations to express their will. The spadework for this political realignment was done by the Abolitionists.

The ascent of the anti-slavery parties was swift, requiring but two decades from the first attempt at political organization in 1840 to the election of Lincoln. But for more than a hundred years, from the founding of the first anti-slavery society in Pennsylvania in 1744, there had proceeded, year by patient year, the gruelling, heart-breaking, often thankless labor of preparation—and this had been the task of the Abolitionists. This was the vanguard, behind which would march the hosts of the future Republican Party. Hundreds of thousands of tireless men and women, Negro and white, distributed tracts, arranged mass meetings, sent speakers on tour, gathered signatures to petitions. They made possible the publication of dozens of journals and hundreds of pamphlets. They organized, in 1833, the American Anti-Slavery Society, and kept it alive with their pennies and their labors. Through the Underground Railroad, they brought two thousand slaves a year to freedom. These were the fore-runners, the pioneers, who sowed what the Republicans reaped.

Many of the early Abolitionists were sectarian; they repudiated political action. But as the aggression of the slaveholders became bolder, there occurred within Abolition ranks a heated discussion of the need for entering politics. Some Abolitionists opposed voting under any circumstances: the Constitution, they said, was a hopelessly pro-slavery document, and the free states must scrap it and separate themselves from the slave states. Other Abolitionists advocated voting, and also such political activities

as presenting petitions and questioning candidates, but were opposed to leaving the two major parties.

Thus James G. Birney, who was later to become a Presidential candidate on an anti-slavery third-party ticket, wrote in 1836 in the Abolition organ, *The Philanthropist*: "Let our votes be given . . . to the most worthy without partisan distinction."⁹ Again, *The Philanthropist* wrote in 1838: "We are utterly opposed to every measure that looks toward a separate political organization. . . . We should as much regret to see abolitionists drawing off from the parties to which they belong as we should to see them leaving the churches of which they are members to build up a separate anti-slavery church."¹⁰ The analogy was false. The difference lay in the fact that with the exception of the Episcopal, no church was wholly lost to the anti-slavery struggle, and many northern church organizations became important factors in anti-slavery. But both of the major parties were instruments of the slave power.

Some Abolitionists feared that "zeal for human rights would be smothered in the dust of party conflict."¹¹ Others argued that votes for a new, anti-slavery party would draw strength from the Whig Party and give victory to the Democrats. To the last, they clung to the forlorn notion that the Whig Party could be transformed into an anti-slavery party, even after the Whigs had again and again shattered this hope.

The Liberty Party

So sharp was the difference among Abolitionists on the question of political action that it led to a split in the Abolition organization. In May, 1840, at the annual convention of the American Anti-Slavery Society, some delegates withdrew and formed the American and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society, which embraced political action, while the original organization continued to stress "moral suasion."

The Abolition split had been occasioned by the formation in

that same year of the first of the anti-slavery parties, the Liberty Party. The party was the work, chiefly, of "political Abolitionists." In 1840 and again in 1844, it ran James G. Birney, a former slaveholder who had freed his slaves, and who was now a leading Abolitionist, for the Presidency, receiving 7,069 votes in the first election, and in the second, 62,300. The totals would have been far greater had not most Abolitionists still rejected political action entirely, or remained within the old party ranks. The Liberty Party drew its strength chiefly from the Northeast.

The new party's platform in 1844 demanded an end to slavery in the District of Columbia, and no expansion of slavery into the territories.* It declared itself opposed to slavery everywhere, as "against natural rights." The party called for disobedience to the fugitive-slave law of 1793. It spoke for the rights of labor, for free speech, for the right of petition.

In answer to those who feared that a vote for the Liberty Party would be thrown away, the party's platform resolved:

"That we can never lose our vote, although in ever so small a minority, when cast for the slave's redemption; as each vote for the slave, whether in minority or majority, is a part of that great mass of means which will work out his final deliverance.

"That the Whig and Democratic parties always throw away their votes, whether in a majority or minority, and do worse than throw them away, as long as they cast them for binding the slave with fetters, and loading him with chains . . . which these parties have always done, in bowing down to the slaveholding portions of said parties."¹²

The Liberty Party, first among all political parties in the United States, specifically invited the participation of the Negro people and brought them into its leadership. Thus John M. Langston was elected, on a Liberty Party ticket, clerk of a township in which he was the only Negro resident. This was the first known

* The word "territory" is used in this pamphlet as it was used in the United States before the settlement of the West was complete. It meant any area held by the Federal government and not yet admitted to statehood.

instance of a Negro being nominated for office by any political party and elected by popular vote. Frederick Douglass became a member of the Liberty Party's National Committee, and in 1853 was named on its ticket for secretary of state of New York. Other Negro leaders, from 1840 on, supported and worked for the new party—Samuel Ringgold Ward, Henry Highland Garnet, J. W. Loguen, William Wells Brown. The National Convention of Colored Citizens, one of the many Negro conventions of the pre-Civil War period, met in Buffalo in 1843 and passed a resolution advocating the principles of the Liberty Party. The Negro people, however, were not unanimous in their political ideas; some followed the "non-voting" principle, and others supported the Whig or Democratic parties. Most northern Negroes were disfranchised by state law, but many were nevertheless active in party work.¹³

The Liberty Party was a pioneer in the field of political Abolition. Most of its members soon entered a broader coalition, the Free-Soil Party. The occasion for the formation of the Free-Soil Party was two new slavery aggressions, which followed one upon the heels of the other: the annexation of Texas and the Mexican War. Here was the crucible in which existing party lines were dissolved.

Texas, detached from Mexico by a slave-owners' revolt engineered in 1836, was added to the United States as a slave state in 1845. A year later, an American boundary dispute with Mexico provided a long-sought pretext for war, and there ensued a two-years' crusade on behalf of the slave power, resulting in the cession from Mexico to the United States of 529,000 square miles of land.

Shortly after the outbreak of war in 1846, David Wilmot, Representative from Pennsylvania, introduced into Congress a measure which came to be known as the Wilmot Proviso, barring slavery in any territory that might be acquired from Mexico as a result of the war. Time after time the proviso passed the House, only to fail in the Senate. Its historical importance was to lie,

not in its rejection by Congress, but in the fact that it let loose a storm which uprooted the old political organizations, and cleared the field for political realignment around the sole issue of slavery extension.

Internal Dissension in the Old Parties

The proviso became the test of the sentiments of political leaders in the Whig and Democratic parties. Both pro-slavery and anti-slavery constituents demanded that office-seekers and party leaders make known their stand on this measure. Soon the Whig and Democratic parties were split wide open on this one, all-important problem.

For a time after the rise of the slavery question, the Whig Party held northern manufacturers, and even some western farmers, by favoring protective tariffs and federal subsidies for railroads.* But some of its state organizations, particularly in the South, and its national committee, pandered to the slaveholders, bidding in ever more unprincipled fashion for their support. Even in the North, the Whig Party was heavily influenced by the pro-slavery bankers and merchants. So that in the end, as the issue of slavery became the pivot around which the nation's life turned, the Whig Party was doomed to internal dissidence and eventual shipwreck.

In June, 1848, the Whig National Convention nominated for President, Zachary Taylor, the general who had carried out the military sortie that led to the Mexican War. The party platform repudiated the Wilmot Proviso.

The action of the Whig convention was the signal for a storm of revolt in the party's state and county organizations. County after county, in heated meetings, repudiated both the platform and the nomination. "The Whig Party is . . . sold to the Southern slave-holder," said a party newspaper, and this was the sentiment

* This explains Lincoln's early adherence to the Whig Party.

of many Whig organs.¹⁴ The anti-slavery elements in the party became known as "Conscience Whigs" in contrast to the pro-slavery or "Cotton Whigs." A call went out to dissatisfied Whigs to meet in national convention.

Within the Democratic Party, also, events soon led to fission. With the end of the Jackson administrations, the Democratic Party was rapidly transformed into the party of the slaveholders. John Tyler, a pro-slavery man who became President upon the death of William Henry Harrison, signed the Texas annexation bill in 1845. In that same year, James K. Polk became the first of a long line of Presidents, elected on an openly pro-slavery platform—a succession that would end only with the inauguration of Lincoln in 1861.

The Democratic Party began to lose the adherence of those who opposed the slaveholders. The inevitable division came, as in the Whig Party, in 1848, and for the same reason. In that year, the Democratic National Convention nominated Lewis Cass, who had favored the annexation of Texas, and who as Senator from Michigan vigorously opposed the Wilmot Proviso. The platform, needless to say, was drawn up to please the slaveholders.

The first revolt against the course of the Democratic Party in 1848 took place in the New York State organization. Here, the anti-slavery rebels were called "Barnburners"; the pro-slavery men, "Hunkers."* In every other northern state, similar revolts occurred, the anti-slavery Democrats becoming known outside New York as Free-Soil Democrats. The dissatisfied Democrats, also, called for a national convention of the rebellious elements of the party.

* The term "Barnburner" was derived from the accusation of pro-slavery Democrats that the anti-slavery men in the party were ready to scuttle the organization to get rid of slavery; that in this, they were like the man who burned down his barn to get rid of the rats. The origin of the term "Hunker" is obscure, but the "Hunkers" were said to "hunger" or "hanker" for office; all desirable offices were in the hands of the slaveholders.

Throughout 1847 and 1848, anti-slavery Whigs and anti-slavery Democrats combined in non-partisan meetings around the issue of the Wilmot Proviso. A fusion of forces seemed to be indicated, and it came at the Buffalo convention which formed the Free-Soil Party, uniting Conscience Whigs, Barnburner and Free-Soil Democrats, and most of the Liberty Party.

The Free-Soil platform of 1848 urged the voters to forget "all past political differences in a common resolve to maintain the rights of Free Labor against the aggressions of the Slave Power, and to secure Free Soil for a Free People." It demanded an act of Congress prohibiting slavery in the territories; a Homestead Act; and federal subsidies for internal improvements. It raised the slogan: "Free Soil, Free Speech, Free Labor, and Free Men."¹⁵ For President, it named Martin Van Buren.

The 1848 Free-Soil convention had in its leadership many prominent Negroes, including Frederick Douglass, Samuel Ringgold Ward, Henry Highland Garnet, Charles Lenox Remond, and Henry Bibb.¹⁶

Soon came still another slavery aggression, the so-called Compromise of 1850. By the terms of this compromise, New Mexico and Utah were to be admitted without prohibition of slavery, and a new, stringent fugitive-slave law was passed, whose provisions were designed to make slave-catchers of all citizens on free soil. The law touched off a fury of resentment, and popular meetings and even local and state legislatures publicly resolved to render its provisions null and void. Much of the indignation found vent in the Free-Soil Party's second campaign in 1852, the party entering the political field under the name of Free Democracy.

Death of the Whig Party

The Whig Party, meanwhile, was in its death throes. Pulled here and there by the presence in its ranks of pro-slavery and anti-slavery forces, it continued its nervous, tight-rope walk until

its disappearance from the political arena. By 1852, it had thrown its weight almost wholly to the slave power. Its platform of that year, while evading direct statements as far as possible, declared in favor of states' rights and for limitations on the power of the Federal government. This, under the specific conditions of the time, meant that the slaveholders had the right to expand their domain and the Federal government had no right to interfere. The platform declared also for obedience to the fugitive-slave law. Four years later, in 1856, the Whig platform regretted the "disordered condition of our national affairs," regretted "sectionalism and geographical parties," and put forward a candidate "pledged to neither geographical section . . . but holding both in just and equal regard."¹⁷

Thus the Whig Party finally proved itself useless as an anti-slavery instrument; and as a pro-slavery instrument, the Democratic Party was far more useful. By 1860, it had neither platform nor candidate.

Even swifter would have been its end, had it not been argued, and in some quarters believed, that the Whig Party was a "lesser evil" as compared with the Democratic Party. The Whigs were quick to charge the new parties with entering into bargains with the Democrats and with running third-party tickets only so that the Democrats might win the elections. This charge was made against Birney in 1844. The charges of political collusion, and the "lesser evil" argument, however, had less and less force as the Whig Party's pandering to the slaveholders became more obvious. The leaders of anti-slavery fought the "lesser evil" theory; Frederick Douglass, in a speech early in 1854, showed that on the basic issue of the day, slavery extension, the two major parties were one. "They are in fact of one heart and one mind," he declared.¹⁸

The Liberty Party and the Free-Soil Party were third parties. They were to merge in 1854 with a larger coalition which in 1856 became the second party, and in 1860, the first party. That party was the Republican.

The 1850 Compromise had been presented by the pro-slavery forces as a finality. Four years after its adoption came still another slavery aggression, bolder than any heretofore attempted. Stephen Douglas, Senator from Illinois and perennial aspirant for the Democratic Presidential nomination, introduced in 1854 the Kansas-Nebraska Bill. This bill declared that the Missouri Compromise, which in 1820 had set a limit to slavery expansion, was no longer applicable. The Kansas-Nebraska Bill laid down, instead, the principle of "popular sovereignty"—that the settlers of a territory might themselves vote for slavery or for freedom.

But "popular sovereignty," for all its democratic sound, was tricky, deceitful. It opened a hitherto free area to slavery, extending a brutal and reactionary system. Further, it was merely an illusion that the pro-slavery government at Washington would admit as a free state any area that might be useful for slavery. Even when, as in Kansas, the settlers voted overwhelmingly for freedom, the slave power still refused it entrance into the Union. Thus Kansas was barred from admission until 1861, when the imminence of the Civil War sent most of the pro-slavery members of Congress home to the Confederacy.

So "popular sovereignty" in effect threw open all territory to slave settlement and paved the way for the forcible invasion of the West by the slaveholders.

The struggle around the Kansas-Nebraska Bill was the greatest single factor fusing all anti-slavery elements into a single mass party. Such indignation did the bill arouse in the North that Stephen Douglas, its author, wrote that he could have traveled from Boston to Chicago by the light of his own burning effigies. The fight for a free Kansas united out-and-out Abolitionists with "anti-slavery" men who opposed only the extension of slavery. It brought thousands of people, hitherto indifferent to the issue, face to face with the slave power, and threw hundreds of them into armed struggle with the representatives of the slaveholders.

When the slaveholders, upon passage of the Kansas-Nebraska Bill in 1854, sent their armed emissaries into the territory to loot,

to stuff ballot-boxes, to terrorize and kill, and by all possible means to seize Kansas for slavery, there began an organized migration to Kansas of free settlers from the North. Those who were not Abolitionists soon became "abolitionized" in the struggle. From 1854 to 1860, the nation's attention was focused on "Bleeding Kansas," where the contestants had at last come to grips in warfare. In the course of these six years, the Republican Party was born, matured, and assumed national power.

Birth of the Republican Party

The same year, 1854, which saw the passage of the Kansas-Nebraska Bill saw also the birth of the Republican Party. A grass-roots movement, it came into existence in many places. At a celebration of the party's thirtieth anniversary in Maine, a speaker remarked that while seven cities claimed to be the birthplace of Homer, seven states claimed to be the birthplace of the Republican Party.¹⁹

Probably the first impulse to the new party was given at a meeting in the town of Ripon, Wisconsin, held in February, 1854, pursuant to a notice sent out under the signatures of a Whig, a Democrat, and a Free-Soiler. The meeting, held in the Congregational Church, resolved that if the Kansas-Nebraska Bill, recently introduced, became law, old party lines were to be considered dissolved, and a new political party was to be formed, to be called Republican.

A second gathering at Ripon a month later took definite steps to organize the party on a local scale. The initiator of the Ripon meetings, A. E. Bovay, had been secretary-treasurer of the National Industrial Congress, one of the earliest attempts to organize labor on a nationwide scale. Bovay later wrote of the Ripon movement: "I went from house to house and from shop to shop and halted men on the streets to get their names for the meeting. . . . At that time there was not more than a hundred voters in Ripon, and by a vast deal of earnest talking I obtained fifty-

three of them. . . . We went into the little meeting, Whigs, Free-Soilers and Democrats. We came out of it Republicans."²⁰

At about the same time, Mr. Bovay wrote to Horace Greeley, editor of the powerful *New York Tribune*:

"Advocate calling together in every church and schoolhouse in the free states all the opponents of the Kansas-Nebraska Bill, no matter what their party affiliations. Urge them to forget previous political names and organizations, and to band together."²¹

The Kansas-Nebraska Bill was passed in May, and in July a mass meeting was called at Jackson, Michigan, to form the Republican Party on a state scale. Ten thousand people signed the call. These people were of all political faiths. The meeting overflowed the largest hall in the area and was therefore held in the open air; it is known in Republican Party history as "the meeting under the oaks." It nominated for the state elections a mixed ticket of former Whigs, former Democrats, and former Free-Soilers, and passed the following resolution:

"That postponing and suspending all differences with regard to political economy or administrative policy, in view of the imminent danger that Kansas and Nebraska will be grasped by Slavery . . . we will act cordially and faithfully in unison."²²

In other states of the North and Northwest, similar meetings were held. The new party grew with especial rapidity in the Northwest. Free farmers there were almost unanimous in their opposition to the extension of slavery. In the Northwest, further, the pro-slavery influence of merchant and banking capitalists was virtually non-existent.*

* Marx recognized the immense importance of the Northwest in the political life of the United States in these years. "A closer study of this American business," he wrote to Frederick Engels on July 1, 1861, "has shown me that the conflict between South and North . . . was finally . . . brought to a head by the weight thrown into the scales by the extraordinary development of the Northwestern states. The population there, richly mixed with fresh German and English elements, and in addition self-working farmers for the most part, was naturally not so easily intimidated as the gentlemen of Wall Street and the Quakers of Boston. . . . In 1860 these Northwestern states provided the bulk of the

Although the movement for the new party went forward rapidly, there was scepticism in old-party ranks. On July 27, 1854, the *Illinois State Journal* of Springfield wrote: "There will be, in our opinion, no large third party. There have always been but two large permanent parties in the country; and when the Nebraska matter is disposed of, the members of the Free-Soil [read Republican—E.L.] Party will fall into the ranks of one of the two parties."

Almost immediately, however, the party began to meet with successes, electing local and state officials, and sending its candidates to Congress. In November of 1854, several states elected Republican governors. In the 34th Congress, which met in 1855, there were fifteen Republican Senators and 117 "anti-Nebraska" Representatives—that is, men opposed to the Kansas-Nebraska Bill, whatever their formal political affiliation.²³ The Republican Party did not hesitate to endorse and work for candidates who ran under the old-party labels, provided only that they opposed the extension of slavery.

The party held its first national convention in 1856. Its platform called upon all the people, "without regard to past political differences or divisions," to oppose the Kansas-Nebraska Act and the extension of slavery. The greater portion of the platform concerned itself with Kansas, asking its admission as a free state. It called upon Congress to prohibit slavery in the territories. It asked the building of a railroad to the Pacific with federal funds, and appropriations by Congress to improve rivers and harbors.²⁴

On this platform, Presidential candidate John C. Fremont, explorer, Abolitionist, and future Civil War general, carried eleven states and received 1,341,264 votes, almost an exact third of the total cast for all three candidates, the Democratic, the American, and the Republican. It trailed the Democratic Party by only 497,000 votes. In its first national campaign, the new, third party had become the second party of the nation.

government party and the president." (Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *The Civil War in the United States*, p. 226, New York, 1937.)

The Abolitionists, with the exception of some sectarians who still held aloof, supported the Republican Party, while reserving their right to criticize and to press the party to extend its aim from mere non-extension of slavery to abolition. Frederick Douglass pointed out that in his opinion "... a man was not justified in refusing to assist his fellowmen to accomplish a good thing simply because his fellows refuse to accomplish some other good thing which they deem impossible." He did not approve of any theory "which would prevent us from voting with men for the abolition of slavery in Maryland, simply because our companions refuse to include Virginia." "We have turned Whigs and Democrats into Republicans and we can turn Republicans into Abolitionists," he wrote.²⁵

In the 1856 election, there took place a diversionary movement which delayed the advance of many anti-slavery Whigs and Democrats into the Republican Party. With the appearance of the Republicans on the scene, the sympathizers with slavery began to build up with all possible speed a secret organization which had existed since 1850, the "Order of the Star-Spangled Banner." This group had opposed the influence of Catholics and the foreign-born. The American Party, which grew out of the "Order," was popularly known as the "Know-Nothing Party," because its members were instructed to answer all questions with the phrase, "I know nothing."

The American Party in its national platform urged that native-born citizens be preferred to foreign-born in filling state, federal, or municipal offices. It asked for a change in the naturalization laws, making continued residence of twenty-one years a condition for citizenship. The party was also anti-Catholic.²⁶

At the meeting of its national council in 1855, the American Party adopted a resolution that Congress should not touch slavery in the territories, or even in the District of Columbia.

Behind the party stood the banking and mercantile interests, the northern allies of the slaveholders; therein lay the reason for its secrecy. Although the party was short-lived, it accomplished

its purpose. It slowed down the formation and consolidation of the Republican Party, in whose ranks were many foreign-born, by setting native-born citizens against immigrants. Many anti-slavery Whigs and Democrats, especially in the Northeast, were caught for a time in the web spun by the American Party. James Gordon Bennett, editor of the *New York Herald*, which had the full confidence of the slaveholders, wrote that "... but for the distracting element of Know-Nothingism in 1856, the opposition would have buried the Democracy in that campaign."²⁷

Events in the latter half of the decade continued to feed the indignation against the slavocracy. In 1857, to assure once and for all slavery's unhindered right to expansion, the Supreme Court handed down the Dred Scott decision. It declared the Missouri Compromise, and any other legislation which might limit slavery in the territories, to be unconstitutional. The decision, in effect, outlawed also the principle of "popular sovereignty"; not even a territorial legislature might reject slavery.

The Dred Scott decision caused a further split in the ranks of the Democrats. Some northern Democrats became Republicans, at last recognizing "popular sovereignty" for a fraud. Other northern Democrats, however, still held to the "popular sovereignty" theory. They took their stand on the doctrine enunciated at Freeport, Illinois, by Senator Stephen Douglas. There, in the course of his debates with Abraham Lincoln in 1858, Douglas, in answer to a penetrating question from Lincoln, maintained that the people of a territory might, through "unfriendly legislation," prevent the existence of slavery in practice even before their territory was admitted to statehood.

The southern Democrats, adopting as their platform the Dred Scott decision, denied that even the territorial legislature had a right to interfere with slavery. They, indeed, called the doctrine of Douglas the "Freeport heresy." A small heresy it seemed; yet even this the slaveholders would not permit, so arrogant had they grown. On no other points did the two factions disagree. Never-

theless, when the Democratic convention nominated Douglas in 1860, the southern Democrats, whose doctrine it was that no power on earth might interfere with slavery, withdrew from the convention, called themselves the Democratic Party (Breckinridge Faction) and nominated John C. Breckinridge for President.

Thus, during the decade from 1850 to 1860, the political face of America had been radically altered. The Whig Party had collapsed; the American Party had also undergone dissolution as a result of a split on the all-pervasive slavery issue, and its members had joined either the Republicans or the Democrats. Of all the old parties, only the Democratic remained, and it was hopelessly rent.

The outlook for a Republican victory was good. The old parties were dead or divided. In addition, the continued slavery aggressions and the unceasing hammering of the Abolitionists upon the moral, social, political, and economic rottenness of slavery, were bringing recruits in ever greater numbers into the anti-slavery ranks.

The 1860 Republican Convention

Four years after its first national campaign, the Republican Party met again in national convention in Chicago, on May 16, 1860. To this convention came 466 delegates, representing all the free states, and also the slave states of Delaware, Maryland, Virginia, and Missouri, where there was strong anti-slavery sentiment among the masses of white people.

For the meeting, a special two-story structure of pine boards, 180 feet long by 1,000 feet wide, had been raised on Lake Street, a building known as the Wigwam. It was the intention of the Republican managers, especially those who favored the election of Lincoln, to invite the participation of the people in the convention itself, even of those who were not delegates. The Wigwam was built to accommodate 10,000, and that number poured

into it daily, with twice as many on the streets outside. A man on the roof watched the proceedings through an open skylight, relaying events to the crowds that were unable to enter. The galleries cheered and applauded, or jeered and hooted. It was the first political convention of its kind in the United States.

Murat Halstead, reporter for the *Cincinnati Commercial*, an eye-witness of all the party conventions in 1860, wrote of the crowds in the Wigwam:

"Three doors about twenty feet wide each, were simultaneously thrown open, and three torrents of men roared in, rushing headlong for front positions. The standing room, holding four thousand five hundred persons, was packed in about five minutes. The galleries, where only gentlemen accompanied by ladies are admitted, and which contains nearly three thousand persons, was already full. . . . Ladies to accompany gentlemen were in demand—school-girls were found on the street, and given a quarter each to see a gentlemen safe in. Other girls, those of undoubted character (no doubt on the subject whatever), were much sought after as escorts."²⁸

Two candidates for the Presidency were foremost from the start of the convention: Abraham Lincoln and Senator William H. Seward of New York. Seward, it has often been said by historians, was the abler man, the more pronounced radical, a figure untainted with compromise. Seward's history does not bear out this contention. Although his services to anti-slavery were great at an earlier period, by 1860 he had begun to make concessions to the slave power. During the last years of his senatorship, he veered now to anti-slavery oratory, now to apologetics for the slaveholders, even going so far as to appeal on the floor of the Senate for further compromise. His denunciations of John Brown were hardly outdone in the South. His subsequent conduct—which caused Karl Marx to characterize him as one of the "virtuosos of the lungs"*—showed that the choice of the Chicago

* Marx made a penetrating analysis of Seward in an article in the *Vienna Presse*, on November 26, 1861. He wrote: "During the winter session of Congress,

convention was correct. After the elections, Seward, as Secretary of State, became the outstanding proponent of further concessions to slavery. Also he opposed the relief of Fort Sumter, preferring to march the Federal garrison out with no show of resistance.

Abraham Lincoln

What was Lincoln's record? Who was he? A political accident? A compromise with the forces of slavery appeasement? An inexperienced nonentity selected precisely because of his mediocre status? Many a historian would have us believe so—but the record speaks with a different voice.

For some fourteen years Abraham Lincoln, although not an Abolitionist, had been growing in stature as the nation's foremost political opponent of the expansion of slave territory. A Congressman from Illinois during the war against Mexico, he had, at the risk of almost certain disaster to his political future, decried the war as a crusade for slavery, and had introduced into Congress the so-called "spot resolutions." President Polk had declared that American blood had been shed on American soil, and that war therefore existed by act of Mexico. Lincoln demanded in his "spot resolutions" that the President inform Congress and the nation at precisely what spot American blood had been shed. Congress rejected the resolutions, knowing that the altercation had taken place on the Mexican side of the border. In the course of the war, Lincoln voted, as he later said, "about forty times" for the Wilmot Proviso.

Seward made himself the focus of all attempts at compromise; the Northern organs of the South, such as the *New York Herald* . . . suddenly extolled him as the statesman of reconciliation, and, in fact, it was not his fault that peace at any price did not come to pass. . . . He has provided fresh proof that virtuosos of the 'lungs are dangerously inadequate statesmen. Read his state dispatches! What a repulsive mixture of greatness of phrase and smallness of mind, of mimicry of strength and acts of weakness!" (*The Civil War in the United States*, p. 99.)

In Congress, further, Lincoln introduced a bill for the abolition of slavery in the District of Columbia, where clearly, the Federal government had authority.

After Douglas had pushed through the Kansas-Nebraska Bill, Illinois voters brought Lincoln forward to denounce Douglas in his home state. Lincoln's speech against the Kansas-Nebraska Bill on October 16, 1854, was a memorable one. In the course of this speech, denying Douglas's contention that "popular sovereignty" meant self-government, Lincoln said:

"The doctrine of self-government is right—absolutely and eternally right—but it has no just application as here attempted. . . . When the white man governs himself, that is self-government; but when he governs himself and also governs another man, that is more than self-government—that is despotism. . . . No man is good enough to govern another man without that other's consent." 29

Stephen Douglas, foremost proponent in the North of slavery expansion, vied with Lincoln for the Senatorship in 1858. The interest in the campaign passed the bounds of Illinois; it became the most significant political contest of the day. It was in the course of these debates, in which Lincoln denounced the Dred Scott decision, declared for freedom in all the unorganized territories, and revealed his hatred of slavery, that he grew into a figure nationally known. To the East he became familiar through his Cooper Union address in New York in February, 1860, and through his tour of New England in the same year.

It has become the fashion among both left-sectarian and neo-Confederate historians to say that Lincoln cared nothing about slavery. Quotations to the contrary could be multiplied into a small volume; one of the most important was his statement of Republican principles during his debate with Douglas at Alton, Illinois, in 1858. "The real issue in this controversy," he declared, ". . . is the sentiment on the part of one class that looks upon the institution of slavery as a wrong, and of another class that does not look upon it as a wrong. The sentiment that con-

templates the institution of slavery in this country as a wrong is the sentiment of the Republican Party. It is the sentiment around which all their actions, all their arguments, circle; from which all their propositions radiate. They look upon it as being a moral, social, and political wrong; and while they contemplate it as such, they nevertheless have due regard for its actual existence among us, and the difficulties of getting rid of it in any satisfactory way, and to all the constitutional obligations thrown about it. Yet, having a due regard for these, they desire a policy in regard to it that looks to its not creating any more danger. They insist that it, as far as may be, be treated as a wrong; and one of the methods of treating it as a wrong is to make provision that it shall grow no larger. They also desire a policy that looks to a peaceful end of slavery some time, as being a wrong. . . . I have said, and I repeat it here, that if there be a man amongst us who does not think that the institution of slavery is wrong in any one of the aspects of which I have spoken, he is misplaced and ought not to be with us."³⁰

Again, in denouncing Senator Stephen Douglas' statement in regard to the principle of "popular sovereignty," "I care not whether slavery is voted up or voted down," Lincoln said in 1854:

"This declared indifference, but, as I must think, covert real zeal, for the spread of slavery, I cannot but hate. I hate it because of the monstrous injustice of slavery itself. I hate it because it deprives our republican example of its just influence in the world; enables the enemies of free institutions with plausibility to taunt us as hypocrites; causes the real friends of freedom to doubt our sincerity."³¹

As well known as Seward's vacillations was Lincoln's resoluteness on the issue of slavery extension. More than a year before the 1860 convention, he wrote to one of the Republican leaders:

"You will probably adopt resolutions in the nature of a platform. I think the only temptation will be to lower the Republican standard in order to gather recruits. In my judgment such

a step would be a serious mistake, and open a gap through which more would pass out than pass in. And this would be the same whether the letting down should be in deference to Douglassism or to the Southern opposition element; either would surrender the object of the Republican organization—the preventing the spread and nationalization of slavery. This object surrendered, the organization would go to pieces. . . . It will result in gaining no single electoral vote in the South, and losing every one in the North."³² Again, to his managers at the Chicago convention, Lincoln wrote: "Entertain no proposition for a compromise in regard to the extension of slavery. The instant you do they have us under again; all our labor is lost."³³

To the foreign-born, Lincoln's candidacy was welcome—and the foreign-born carried immense weight in the election of 1860. In the single decade from 1850 to 1860, more than two-and-a-half million immigrants had arrived in America. It was known that Lincoln opposed the Know-Nothings. In a personal letter—to give only one of many possible citations—Lincoln had written in 1855 a denunciation of the American Party:

"I am not a Know-Nothing; that is certain. . . . Our progress in degeneracy appears to me to be pretty rapid. As a nation, we began by declaring that 'all men are created equal.' We now practically read it 'all men are created equal, except Negroes.' When the Know-Nothings get control, it will read 'all men are created equal, except Negroes and foreigners and Catholics.' When it comes to this, I shall prefer emigrating to some country where they make no pretense of loving liberty."³⁴

The workers felt close to Lincoln not only for his anti-slavery sentiments, but also for his working-class background and his utterances on the rights of labor. In a speech in Connecticut, where shoe workers were on strike in 1860, Lincoln had said: "I am glad to see that a system of labor prevails in New England under which laborers can strike when they want to, where they are not obliged to work under all circumstances, and are not tied

down and obliged to labor whether you pay them or not! I like the system that lets a man quit when he wants to."⁸⁵

This was the man who contested the Republican nomination with Seward in 1860, the man whom many a historian has sneered at as merely "available." If "availability" means that Lincoln had an excellent record; that he was known to be highly principled, particularly on the question of barring the way to the extension of slavery; that he was loved by the foreign-born for his opposition to the Know-Nothings, by the workers for his defense of their rights, and by the farmers for his support of the Homestead Act—then Lincoln was certainly an "available" candidate. His stand on the tariff and on internal improvements made him acceptable to the northern manufacturers, although they preferred Seward.

Nor was Lincoln's nomination an afterthought. As early as 1858, northwestern newspapers and northwestern Republican conventions on a local scale had repeatedly urged his candidacy.

From the galleries of the Wigwam in Chicago came enthusiastic support for Lincoln. An observer wrote that when Lincoln's name was brought before the convention, there was such an uproar of approval that "A thousand steam whistles, ten acres of hotel gongs, a tribe of Comanches, headed by a choice vanguard from pandemonium, might have mingled in the scene unnoticed."⁸⁶

On the first ballot, the vote stood: Seward, 173½; Lincoln, 102; with a scattering of votes to other candidates. Seward, though leading, lacked the majority necessary for nomination—233. The second ballot gave Seward 184½; Lincoln 181. Clearly, Lincoln was drawing strength from the scattered votes faster than was Seward. "Call the roll," shouted the delegates, frantic with impatience. On the third ballot Lincoln had 231½—only 1½ votes short of the needed majority. In a moment a delegate from Ohio rose to change four votes from Chase to Lincoln. There was no need to announce the result; almost every person in the hall, delegate or no, was busy with pencil and paper, keeping

count for himself. Then (the reporter Murat Halstead wrote to his paper) "There was a noise in the wigwam like the rush of a great wind, in the van of a storm—and in another breath, the storm was there. There were thousands cheering with the energy of insanity.

"A man who had been on the roof, and was engaged in communicating the results of the balloting to the mighty mass of outsiders, now demanded by gestures at the sky-light over the stage, to know what had happened. One of the Secretaries, with the tally sheet in his hands, shouted—'Fire the salute! Abe Lincoln has been nominated.' As the cheering inside the wigwam subsided, we could hear that outside, where the news of the nomination had just been announced. And the roar, like the breaking up of the foundations of the great deep that was heard, gave a new impulse to the enthusiasm inside. Then the thunder of the salute rose above the din, and the shouting was repeated with such tremendous fury that some discharges of the cannon were absolutely not heard by those on the stage. Puffs of smoke, drifting by the open doors, and the smell of gunpowder, told what was going on. . . .

"I left the city on the night train. . . . Cheers went up along the road for 'Old Abe.' . . . At every station where there was a village, until after two o'clock, there were tar barrels burning, drums beating, boys carrying rails; and guns, great and small, banging away. The weary passengers were allowed no rest, but plagued by the thundering jar of cannon, the clamor of drums, the glare of bonfires, and the whooping of the boys, who were delighted with the idea of a candidate for the Presidency, who thirty years ago split rails on the Sangamon River—classic stream now and forevermore—and whose neighbors called him 'honest!'"⁸⁷

For Vice-Presidential candidate, the convention chose Hannibal Hamlin, partly because he had formerly been an adherent of the Democratic Party. Since Lincoln had formerly been a Whig,

Hamlin's candidacy would balance the ticket and emphasize the coalition character of the Republican Party.

The most important plank in the platform was the statement that "... the normal condition of all the territory of the United States is that of freedom." The platform decried the threats of secession by southern states. It called for the admission of a free Kansas, and rejected both the Dred Scott decision, with its blessing upon slave settlement in the territories, and the doctrine of "popular sovereignty." It asked protective tariffs for the encouragement of industry, a Homestead Act,* and internal improvements including a railroad to the Pacific. It opposed any change in the naturalization laws abridging the rights of non-citizens or making naturalization more difficult.³⁸

Nor were the demands of the party for homesteads, tariffs, internal improvements, mere vote-catching devices, as the cynical historian would have it. They were the logical demands of a party that opposed the growth of the slave power. Nothing but slavery stood in the way of homesteads, protective tariffs, federal grants for railroads. Opposition to such demands was as much the fruit of slavery as was the bondage of the slave himself.

The inclusion in the platform of a protective tariff plank reflected the strength within the party of manufacturers in such industries as railroads, iron, coal, and wool.

That the platform included the words of the Declaration of Independence, that all men are created equal, was the result of a struggle between the radicals and conservatives in the convention. Only after one of the delegates had started to leave the hall in protest against its omission, and received the vociferous sympathy of the galleries, was the phrase inserted.

The slave power raised a number of arguments in the 1860 campaign. They said that slavery was a positive good, favorable to both whites and Negroes. They used also the slogan of "states' rights," which had been the South's battlecry ever since the free

* The Homestead Act was passed in 1862. It gave 160 acres of land free of cost to every settler who worked it for five years.

states began to outstrip them in population, in industrial production, and even in agriculture, with a consequent increase of influence in national affairs. But the theory of "states' rights" was merely the legal framework, the constitutional shell, within which the struggle over slavery was carried on. The right to which the slogan referred at this period was nothing but the right to own slaves, to expand the system of slavery.

The Anti-Lincoln Campaign of 1860

The slaveholders further stressed that any rupture in good relations between North and South—even short of secession and war—meant withdrawal of southern orders and an end to the North's prosperity. The South had for years threatened northern merchants that if anti-slavery agitation continued, the southern carrying trade would be transferred directly to British and European vessels. Southern newspapers drew up and circulated lists of northern businessmen, dividing them into a blacklist of those who were unfriendly to slavery and a "white list" of those who were subservient. During the 1860 campaign, southern firms withheld their debts to the North pending the outcome of the election, debts amounting to several millions of dollars.

A consciously manipulated stock market panic occurred towards the end of October. The panic had been predicted by the *New York Times* on October 10, in an article entitled: "Wanted—a First Rate Panic." It was subsequently admitted in the press that the break in the market had been deliberately created by a number of bankers as warning of what would happen in case of a Republican victory.³⁹

These tactics brought most northern merchants to their knees. In New York, bankers and merchants brought about a fusion of all anti-Republican candidates on a single ticket for the state.

Nor was a species of red-baiting lacking in the campaign. The *New York Herald* predicted that if the Republicans won, the workers "... would soon turn their attention to the goods and

chattels of their wealthier neighbors, having been long taught by the leading republican journals the doctrine of the communists that 'all property is robbery.'" The *Boston Courier* wrote: "The truth is that Republicanism is neither more nor less than Radicalism. We do not mean that all Republicans are radicals. Far from it—but the operation of its doctrines are to this end. It is a struggle to escape from all restraints of order and law, and as a consequence you will find the whole body of speculators upon morals, religion, government and social revolution in its ranks."⁴⁰

The most important argument of the slaveholders in the 1860 campaign was the threat of secession.

The Republican Campaign of 1860

The Republican campaigns of 1856 and 1860 brought back to the American scene the fervor, the enthusiasm, the moral vigor that had been lacking since the days of Jackson. Here, once more, was a progressive party, a party of principle, for which the voters might work—and they worked for it like fiends. It was a youthful, rebellious organization, defiant of the slave power that had for so long held the nation in the hollow of its hand.

These last election campaigns before the Civil War involved greater numbers of people than any prior campaign in American history. More speeches were made in 1860 than in all previous elections together. For the Republican Party alone, in that year, 50,000 speeches were uttered. Pamphlets were circulated in previously unheard of quantities. These pamphlets contained the text of the Lincoln-Douglas debates; Lincoln's Cooper Union address; Carl Schurz's speech on the Doom of Slavery; William Seward's speech on the Irrepressible Conflict. The *New York Tribune* became the chief organ of the Lincoln campaign, particularly influential in its weekly editions, which went into every city and village of the North and West, in many places having a circulation far greater than the local press.

In the party were many young men, for it was largely a party of youth. These young men organized "Wide-Awake" processions for Lincoln. In Hartford, Connecticut, in the spring of 1860, young Republicans formed a procession to escort the visiting speaker to the hall. They carried torches, and, to protect themselves from the dripping oil, wore capes of glazed cloth. The procession attracted notice, the idea caught on, and soon most towns and cities had similar groups, called Wide-Awakes. The uniform became standard, a glazed cape and cap, and a torch made of a rail on which was placed a swinging lamp. Wide-Awake parades became marches of tens of thousands of people, Negro and white. The Wide-Awakes usually marched to a favorite campaign song:

*Old Abe Lincoln came out of the wilderness,
Out of the wilderness, out of the wilderness,
Old Abe Lincoln came out of the wilderness,
Down in Illinois.*

Almost to a man, Lincoln had the support of the nation's most able writers. Walt Whitman, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Oliver Wendell Holmes, John Greenleaf Whittier (who wrote campaign poetry for the *Atlantic Monthly* and the *New York Tribune*), William Cullen Bryant (who wrote Republican editorials in the *New York Evening Post*), James Russell Lowell (who wrote political satire on the Democrats in the *Atlantic Monthly*), William Dean Howells (who prepared one of the first Lincoln biographies for use in the elections)—these men worked, talked, wrote, voted for Lincoln. Preachers, professors, school-teachers, students, enlisted in the campaign.

Most—though not all—of the foreign-born supported Lincoln because of his anti-slavery, anti-Know-Nothing, pro-Homestead stand. The most active were the German-Americans. Of the 87 German language newspapers, 69 were for Lincoln.

Large numbers of these German immigrants had settled in the Northwest. They had been among the earliest actively to

oppose slavery extension. The fact that most of the German-Americans were either skilled workers or independent farmers, and the experience of many of them in the Revolution of 1848 in their homeland, helped push them forward into the vanguard of the movement against slavery.

It was in part the influence of the German-Americans that brought about Lincoln's nomination. On the two nights preceding the convention's opening in Chicago, German-American societies met in the Deutsches Haus in that city and drafted special demands to the convention, including a firm stand on slavery extension, a Homestead Act, the admission of Kansas, and opposition to any measures abridging the rights of the foreign-born.

Most clear-sighted of all the German-Americans was Joseph Weydemeyer, friend and co-worker of Karl Marx, first organizer of Communist groups in the United States. It was Weydemeyer's primary task to bring home to the German-Americans and to the workers generally their special role in the struggle against slavery. In the American Workers League, organized by the trade unions in 1853, Weydemeyer successfully fought against those who wanted to limit the struggle to "purely economic" demands.

With the exception of those who were influenced by northern merchants, by bankers, and by some manufacturing firms with close ties with the South, the working class was a strong force for Lincoln. The Chicago Workers' Society, an organization of trade unions, brought forward in 1860 the working-class position in the campaign. It queried Republican candidates on their attitude towards labor and labor legislation. The society set up a committee to deal with labor's special interests and sent its own speakers to Republican meetings.⁴¹

The Communist clubs were vigorous in their struggle against slavery, and although small in numbers were useful in explaining to the workers the economic and political foundation of the pro-slavery and anti-slavery movements, and in showing the effects

of slavery on free labor. Lincoln election meetings held by German Republican clubs and trade unions heard many members of the Communist clubs.

The slave power attempted to seduce the workers by the threat of secession and of an end to business relations between the two sections. In this, they achieved some degree of success, especially with those whose jobs depended on shipping and commerce. The overwhelming majority were not confused.

In New York, many firms closed down or curtailed production during the 1860 campaign, blaming the resulting unemployment on the nomination of Lincoln. Some New York clothing firms went further. They arranged a meeting of the tailors of Williamsburg, and urged them to pass a resolution decrying Republican activity as against the interests of the trade unions. A panic would inevitably occur, said the employers, if Lincoln were elected.

The tailors' union, in response, issued a leaflet, which read in part: "Stand by Lincoln and freedom and do not be intimidated. . . . The lackey of the slave power tells you that there is so little work now because the firms that work in the clothing industry for the South are fearful of the election of Lincoln. They lie! . . . They are not giving you any work before the election, to make you believe that all work will stop if Lincoln is elected."⁴²

At the tailors' meeting, the workers refused to allow the employers to speak, and took over the conduct of the meeting themselves, turning it into a Lincoln rally.

Some firms gave their employees circulars urging them to vote for the anti-Republican fusion ticket. "By doing this," the circulars said, "you will take care of yourself and your family. You will get plenty of work and good prices. But if the Republican candidate for President is elected the South will withdraw its custom from us and you will get little work and bad prices."⁴³

Despite this campaign of intimidation, 10,000 more Republican votes were cast in New York City in 1860 than ever before, and although the fusion ticket received a 30,000 majority in the city

itself, the state as a whole voted for Lincoln. Discussing the New York City votes later, a Republican said: "We owe a debt of gratitude to the laboring classes who gave us this victory, not to the mass of the merchants who were frightened by the cry of wolf."⁴⁴

How many of the workers in the North voted for Lincoln? An exact estimate is impossible. However, a noted labor historian says that "There was strong labor support for Lincoln in Pennsylvania, Missouri, Illinois, Ohio, and New England. The labor vote in Boston, Philadelphia, Cincinnati, Lowell, Chicago, and Trenton went for the Republican candidate, and even in New York City, the northern extension of the cotton kingdom, a considerable vote for Lincoln was registered in working-class districts."⁴⁵

Organization, careful attention to details of the election, was a watchword of the campaign. In New York, there was particular need for strong organization, since it was there that the bankers and merchants were most influential. On the day before the election, therefore, orders went out to the Republican ranks: "*Close Up the Work of Preparation To-Night: Leave nothing for tomorrow but direct work. Pick out and station your men. . . . Let there be an assigned place for every man, and, at sunrise, let every man be in his assigned place. Don't wait until the last hour, to bring up delinquents. Consider every man a 'delinquent' who doesn't vote before 10 o'clock. At That Hour Begin to Hunt Up Voters!*"⁴⁶

Lincoln's Third Party Victorious

When the votes were counted on the night of November 6, Lincoln was found to have carried every free state but New

* Adding to the confusion of political parties in 1860, there was organized the Constitutional Union Party, which avoided taking a stand on slavery. It nominated John Bell for the presidency, on a platform which declared "for maintenance of the Union."

Jersey, carrying the slave state of Delaware as well. His popular vote was 1,857,610 as against 1,291,574 for Douglas, 850,082 for Breckinridge, and 646,124 for John Bell.*

Of Lincoln's vote, 26,300 came from the slave states, in which not only the slaves, but large numbers of whites, were disfranchised, and in which an anti-slavery vote was cast literally at the risk of one's life. Forty-three per cent of the Lincoln vote came from the seven northwestern states.

Through the election of 1860, the slaveholders had lost state power. Their hopes for slavery expansion through the existing national government were at an end, and if the Republican Party were allowed to rule, slavery itself would soon be ended.

Faced with the loss of the national governmental apparatus and faced on their home ground by the menace of increasing slave revolts and intense dissatisfaction among the non-slaveholding whites, the slaveholders turned to armed counter-revolution, to secession. They would retake control on their own terms, and establish in the western hemisphere a slave empire.

Against the cowardly offers from the North of new appeasement and betrayal, Lincoln stood firm. In answer to pressure from businessmen in the winter of 1860-61 that he further propitiate slavery, he said: "There is one point . . . I can never surrender—that which was the main issue of the Presidential canvass and decided at the late election, concerning the extension of slavery in the Territories."⁴⁷ To the distress of the appeasers, he sent aid to the besieged garrison at Fort Sumter. The slave-owners knew at last that compromise was at an end. They fired the shot that opened the Civil War.

From the outset of the conflict, the Abolitionists thundered emancipation. Slowly this urging was heeded. The fervor of a fast-growing and increasingly articulate popular movement; the hopes and support of the peoples abroad; the stark necessities of war for manpower and for morale—these overpowered in the end the pleading of Copperheads and conciliators. With the first hesitant steps taken, the pace quickened. And finally, on Sep-

tember 22, 1862, Lincoln issued the preliminary Emancipation Proclamation, declaring that on January 1, 1863, all persons held as slaves in the areas still in rebellion "... shall be then, thenceforward, and forever free."

The struggle against slavery had unleashed the whirlwind of the second American revolution.

A century ago, a deep crisis confronted the nation. To meet that crisis, there arose the Abolitionist organizations, and a new, third party, the Republican—a party hated and persecuted by the old parties and by the classes that wielded power, but loved by the people, and bold to seize the helm in a revolutionary storm.

Today, once more, our nation is confronted with crisis. Over us hangs the threat of fascism at home, and of another world war, brought about by the imperialist greed of American monopoly capital.

Today we can say of the new people's party, the third party, what Abraham Lincoln said of the Republican Party in 1859:

"The party is newly formed; and in forming, old party ties had to be broken, and the attractions of party pride and influential leaders are wholly wanting. In spite of old differences, prejudices, and animosities, its members were drawn together by a permanent common danger. They formed and maneuvered in the face of the disciplined enemy, and in the teeth of all persistent misrepresentations. . . . That army is today the best hope of the nation and of the world. Their work is before them; and from which they may not guiltlessly turn away."⁴⁸

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